is Jesus God?

The Bible Says No!

Shabir Ally

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Is Jesus God?

The Bible Says No!

Part 1:

None of the Bible's Writers Believed That Jesus is God

Christians and Muslims both believe in Jesus, love him, and honour him. They are, however, divided over the question of his divinity. Fortunately, this difference can be resolved if we refer the question to both the Bible and the Qur'an, because, both the Bible and the Qur'an teach that Jesus is not God.

It is clear enough to everyone that the Qur'an denies the divinity of Jesus, so we do not need to spend much time explaining that. On the other hand, many people misunderstand the Bible; they feel that the belief in Jesus as God is so widespread that it must have come from the Bible. In this and the next six messages, we will show quite conclusively that the Bible does not teach that. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is not God. In the Bible God is always someone other than Jesus.

Some will say that something Jesus said or something he did while on the earth proves that he is God. We will show that the disciples never came to the conclusion that Jesus is God. And these are people who lived and walked with Jesus and thus knew first hand what he said and did.

Furthermore, we are told in the Acts of the Apostles in the Bible that the disciples were being guided by the Holy Spirit. If Jesus is God, surely they should know it. But they did not. They kept worshipping the one true God who was worshipped by Abraham, Moses and Jesus (see Acts ch. 3, v. 13).

All of the writers of the Bible believed that God was ***not*** Jesus. The idea that Jesus is God did not become part of Christian belief until after the Bible was written, and took many centuries to become part of the faith of Christians.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke, authors of the first three Gospels, believed that Jesus was not God (see Mark 10:18 and Matthew 19:17). They believed that he was the son of God in the sense of a righteous person. Many others too, are similarly called sons of God (see Matthew ch.23, vv. 1,9).

Paul, believed to be the author of some thirteen or fourteen letters in the Bible, also believed that Jesus is not God. For Paul, God first created Jesus, then used Jesus as the agent by which to create the rest of creation (see Colossians ch. 1, v. 15 and 1Corinthians ch. 8, v. 6). Similar ideas are found in the letter to the Hebrews, and also in the Gospel and Letters of John composed some seventy years after Jesus. In all of these writings, however, Jesus is still a creature of God and is therefore forever subservient to God (see 1 Corinthians 15, v.28).

Now, because Paul, John, and the author of Hebrews believed that Jesus was God's first creature, some of what they wrote clearly show that Jesus was a pre-existent powerful being. This is often misunderstood to mean that he must have been God. But to say that Jesus was God is to go against what these very authors wrote. Although these authors had this later belief that Jesus is greater than all creatures, they also believed that he was still lesser than God. In fact, John quotes Jesus as saying: The Father is greater than I (John ch. 14, v. 28). And

Paul declares that the head of every woman is her husband, the head of every man is Christ, and the head of Christ is God (1 Corinthians ch.11, v. 3).

Therefore, to find something in these writings and claim that these teach that Jesus is God is to misuse and misquote what those authors are saying. What they wrote must be understood in the context of their belief that Jesus is a creature of God as they have already clearly said.

So we see then, that some of the later writers had a higher view of Jesus, but none of the writers of the Bible believed that Jesus is God. The Bible clearly teaches that there is only one true God, the one whom Jesus worshipped (see John ch. 17, v. 3).

In the next six messages we will explore the Bible in more depth, and deal with the passages which are most often misquoted as proof of Jesus' divinity. We will show, with God's help, that these do not mean what they are so often used to prove. May God guide all of us to the truth which leads to eternal life in Paradise.

Part 2:

Evidence From Acts of the Apostles

Jesus performed many miraculous wonders, and he without doubt said a lot of wonderful things about himself. Some people use what he said and did as proof that he was God. But his original disciples who lived and walked with him, and were eyewitnesses to what he said and did, never reached this conclusion. The Acts of the Apostles in the Bible details the activity of the disciples over a period of thirty years after Jesus was lifted up to heaven. Throughout this period they never refer to Jesus as God. They continually and consistently use the title God to refer to someone other than Jesus.

Peter stood up with the eleven disciples and addressed the crowd saying:

> "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited to you by God with miracles, wonders and signs which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22).

It was God, therefore, who did the miracles through Jesus to convince people that Jesus was backed by God. Peter did not see the miracles as proof that Jesus is God.

In fact, the way Peter refers to God and to Jesus makes it clear that Jesus is not God. For he always turns the title God away from Jesus. Take the following references for example:

> "God has raised this Jesus . . ." (Acts 2:32).
> "God has made this Jesus both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

In both passages, the title God is turned away from Jesus. Why? —if Jesus is God.

To Peter, Jesus was a servant of God. Peter said:

> "God raised up his servant,"

where the title servant refers to Jesus (Acts 3:26). This is clear from a previous passage where Peter declared:

> "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus" (Acts 3:13).

Peter must have known that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob never spoke of a Triune God. They always spoke of

Jehovah (i.e. Yahweh) as the only God. Here, as in Matthew ch. 12, v. 18, Jesus is the servant of Yahweh. Matthew tells us that Jesus was the same servant of Yahweh spoken of in Isaiah 42:1. If Matthew and Peter are right, then Jesus is not Yahweh, but Yahweh's servant. This proves that Jesus is not God. The Old Testament repeatedly says that Yahweh is the only God (eg. Isaiah 45: 5). If Yahweh is the name of a triune God, then Jesus is excluded from the Godhead since in that case he would be the servant of the triune God. If, on the other hand, Yahweh is the name of the Father only, then the Father alone is God (since Yahweh alone is God) and Jesus is therefore not God. Either way, Jesus is not God. Peter and Matthew were both right about this.

All of the disciples of Jesus held this view. In Acts ch. 4, v. 25 we are told that the believers prayed to God saying: 24

> "Sovereign Lord, you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them." And it is clear that the one they were praying to was not Jesus, because, two verses later, they referred to Jesus as "your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed" (Acts ch. 4, v. 28).
> 27

If Jesus was God, his disciples should have said this clearly. Instead, they kept preaching that Jesus was God's Messiah. We are told in Acts:

> "Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah" (Acts ch. 5, v. 41).

The Hebrew title Messiah (Christ in Greek) is a human blessed

title. It means “Anointed.” See Isaiah ch. 45, v. 1, where Cyrus the Persian is called God’s Messiah.

If Jesus was God, why would the disciples continually refer to him with human titles like servant and messiah of God, and consistently use the title God for the one who raised Jesus?

Did they fear men? No! They boldly preached the truth fearing neither imprisonment nor death. When they faced opposition from the authorities, Peter declared:

> “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus . . .” (Acts 5:29-30).

Were they lacking the Holy Spirit? No! They were supported by the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:3 4; 4:8; 5:32). They were simply teaching what they had learnt from Jesus — that Jesus was not God but, rather, God’s servant and Messiah.

The Qur’an confirms that Jesus was the Messiah, and that he was God’s servant (Qur’an 3:45; 19:30).

Part 3:

Jesus is Not All-Powerful, and Not All-Knowing

Christians and Muslims agree that God is all-powerful and all-knowing.

The Gospels show that Jesus was not all-powerful, for he had some limitations. Mark tells us in his gospel that Jesus was unable to do any powerful work in his hometown (ch. 6, vv. 5-6). Mark also tells us that when Jesus tried to heal a certain blind man, the man was not healed after the first attempt, and Jesus had to try a second time (see

Mark ch. 8, v. 22-26). Therefore, although we have the utmost love and respect for Jesus, we need to understand that he is not the all-powerful God.

Mark's Gospel also reveals that Jesus had limitations in his knowledge. In Mark ch. 13, v. 32, Jesus declared that he himself does not know when the last day will occur, but the Father alone knows that (see also Matthew 24:36). Therefore he could not have been the all-knowing God.

Some will say that Jesus knew when the last day will occur, but he chose not to tell. But that complicates matters further. Jesus could have said that he knows but he does not wish to tell. Instead, he said that he does not know. We must believe him. Jesus was a man of truth.

The Gospel of Luke also reveals that Jesus had limited knowledge. Luke says that Jesus increased in wisdom (ch. 2, v. 52). In Hebrews too (ch. 5, v. 8) we read that Jesus learned obedience. But God's knowledge is always perfect, and God does not learn new things. He knows everything always. If Jesus learned something new, that proves that he did not know everything before that, and he was not God. Can he become God later? No! Because there is only one God, and He is God from everlasting to everlasting (see Psalms 90, v. 2).

Someone may say that Jesus was God but he took the form of a servant and therefore became limited. Well, that would mean that God changed. But God does not change. He said so Himself in Malachi ch. 3, v. 6. Jesus never was God, and never will be. In the Bible, Yahweh alone is God and Yahweh declares:

> "Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am Yahweh . . . " (Isaiah ch. 43: vv. 10-11).

Some will say that Jesus had two natures, that he was both man and God at the same time. They will say that the limitations we pointed out are limitations in the human nature of Jesus, but his God nature is still unlimited. Notice that the Bible never confirms that Jesus had these two natures. This is a desperate solution offered by those who do not wish to believe what the Bible plainly says. The plain teaching of the Bible, as we have shown, is that Jesus was not God.

This dual-nature solution complicates matters further still. Take for illustration the fig-tree episode in the Gospels (see Mark ch. 11, vv 12-25). Mark tells us as follows:

> "Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs" (Mark 11:12-14).

Jesus then put a curse on the tree, so that no one could eat fruit from it again. The tree withered from the roots by next morning.

Now, it is clear from this passage that Jesus had a lot of power to curse the tree and make it wither from its roots. It is also clear that Jesus' knowledge was limited on two counts. First, he did not know that the tree had no fruit until he came to it. Second, he did not know that it was not the right season to expect figs on trees.

Proponents of the dual-nature theory will have to admit that the power to curse was in Jesus' God nature. They will have to also admit that his lack of knowledge was due to his human nature. They will have to then conclude that the God nature acted at the behest of the limited knowledge stemming from the human nature. But God does not act on ignorance. Surely He would know, as Mark knew, that it was not the season for figs, and that when fig season arrives that tree will provide fruit for God's creatures. Why would God curse a good tree which he created? Some would like to believe that the tree was barren and therefore deserved to be destroyed. But, if Mark was right, the reason the tree had no fruit is "because it was not the season for figs" (Mark 12, v. 13).

These Bible references clearly show that Jesus was not the all-powerful, all-knowing God. But there is more, much more. Please read on.

Part 4:

The Greatest Commandment in the Bible and the Qur'an

Some will say that this whole discussion over the divinity of Jesus is unnecessary. The important thing, they say, is to accept Jesus as your personal saviour. On the contrary, the Bible's writers stressed that, in order to be saved, it is necessary to understand who exactly is God.

Failure to understand this would be to violate the first and greatest of all the commandments in the Bible. This commandment was emphasized by Jesus, on whom be peace, when a teacher of the Law of Moses asked him as follows:

> "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

Jesus replied:

> "The most important one is this: 'Hear O Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one. Love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul

> and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark ch.12, vv.28-29).

Notice that Jesus was quoting the first commandment from the book of Deuteronomy, ch. 6, vv. 4-5. Jesus confirmed not only that this commandment is still valid, but also that it is the most important of all the commandments.

If Jesus thought that he himself is God, why did he not say so? Instead, he stressed that Yahweh alone is God. The man who questioned Jesus understood this, and what the man says next makes it is clear that God is not Jesus, for he said to Jesus:

> "Well said, teacher, you are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him . . ." (v.32).

Now if Jesus was God, he could have told the man so. Instead, he let the man refer to God as someone other than Jesus, and then he even confirmed that the man had spoken wisely (see v. 34).

If Jesus knew that God is a trinity, why did he not say so? Why did he not say that God is one in three, or three in one? Instead, he declared that God is one — full stop. True imitators of Jesus will imitate him also in this declaration of God's oneness. They will not add the word three where Jesus never said it.

Does salvation depend on this commandment? Yes, says the Bible! Jesus made this clear when another man approached Jesus to learn from him (see Mark ch. 10, vv. 17-29). The man fell on his knees and said to Jesus:

> "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus replied:

> "Why do you call me good? No one is good — except God alone." (Mark ch. 12, v. 19).

By so saying, Jesus made a clear distinction between himself and God. Then he proceeded with the answer to the man's question about how to get salvation. He said: If you want to enter life, obey the commandments (Matthew ch. 19, v. 17, cf. Mark ch. 10, v. 19). Remember that the most important of all the commandments, according to Jesus, is to know Yahweh as the only God.

Jesus further emphasized this in the Gospel According to John. In ch. 17, v. 1, Jesus lifted his eyes to heaven and prayed, addressing God as Father. Then in verse three, he said to the Father as follows:

> "And eternal life means knowing you, the only true God, and knowing Jesus Christ, whom you sent" (John 17:3).

This proves beyond doubt that if people are to get eternal life they must know that the one Jesus was praying to is the only true God, and they must know that Jesus was sent by the true God.

Some say that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. But Jesus said that the Father alone is the only true God. True followers of Jesus will follow him in this too. Jesus had said that his true followers are those who hold to his teachings. He said, "If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples" (John 8:31). His teaching is that people must continue to keep the commandments, especially the first commandment which emphasises that Yahweh alone is God, and that Yahweh should be loved with all our hearts and all our strengths.

We love Jesus, but we must not love him as God. Today many love Jesus more than they love God. This is because they see God as a vengeful person who wanted to exact a penalty from them, and they see Jesus as the Saviour who rescued them from the wrath of God. Yet Yahweh is our only Saviour. He said so Himself (see Isaiah 43:11; 45:21-22).

The Qur'an confirms the first commandment and addresses it to all humankind (see 2:163). And God declares that true believers love Him more than anyone else or anything else (2:165).

Part 5:
Paul Believed That Jesus is not God

Many people use Paul's writings as proof that Jesus is God. But this is not fair to Paul, because Paul clearly believed that Jesus is not God.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul wrote:

> "I charge you in the sight of God, and Christ Jesus, and the elect angels, to keep these instructions . . ." (ch. 5, v. 21).

It is clear from this that the title God applies not to Christ Jesus, but to someone else. In the following chapter, he again differentiates between God and Jesus when he says:

> "In the sight of God who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus . . ." (ch. 6, v. 13).

Paul then went on to speak of

> "the second appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ which God will bring about in his own time" (vv. 14-15).

Again, the title God is deliberately turned away from Jesus.

Incidentally, many people think that when Jesus is called "Lord" in the Bible that means "God". But in the Bible this title means master or teacher, and it can be used for addressing humans (see 1 Peter ch. 3, v. 6).

What is more important, however, it to notice what Paul says next, for this will demolish any supposition that Paul took Jesus for God. What he says about God in the following passage clearly shows that Jesus is not God. Paul says:

> "God the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see" (1 Timothy ch. 6, vv. 15-16).

Paul says that God alone is immortal. Immortal means he does not die. Check any dictionary. Now, anyone who believes that Jesus died cannot believe that Jesus is God. Such a belief would contradict what Paul said here. Furthermore, to say that God died is a blasphemy against God. Who would run the world if God died? Paul believed that God does not die.

Paul also said in that passage that God dwells in unapproachable light — that no one has seen God or can see him. Paul knew that many thousands of people had seen Jesus. Yet Paul can say that no one has seen God because Paul was sure that Jesus is not God.

This is why Paul went about teaching not that Jesus was God, but that he was God's Messiah (see Acts 9:22; 16:3; 18:5)

When he was in Athens, Paul spoke of God as "the God who made the world and everything in it," then he identified Jesus as "the man whom God appointed" (Acts 17:24-31). Clearly, for Paul, Jesus was not God, and he would be shocked to see his writings used for proving the opposite of what he believed.

Paul even testified in court saying:

> "I admit that I worship the God of our fathers . . . " (Acts 24:14).

And Jesus is the Servant of that God, for we read in Acts,

> "The God of our fathers has glorified his servant Jesus" (ch. 3, v. 13).

For Paul, the Father alone is God. Paul said that there is "one God and Father of all" (Ephesians ch. 4, v. 6). Paul said again,

> "For us there is but one God, the Father . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 8:6).

Paul's letter to the Philippians ch. 2, vv. 6-11 is often quoted as proof that Jesus is God. But the very passage shows that Jesus is not God. This passage has to agree with Isaiah 45:22-24 where God (Yahweh) said that every knee should bow to Yahweh, and every tongue should confess that righteousness and strength are in Yahweh alone. Paul was aware of this passage, for he quoted it in Romans 14:11. Knowing this, Paul declared,

> "I kneel before the Father" (Ephesians 3:14).

The letter to the Hebrews (ch. 1, v. 6) says that the angels of God should worship the Son. But this passage depends on Deuteronomy, ch. 32, v. 43, in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. This phrase cannot be found in the Old Testament used by Christians today, and the Septuagint version is no longer considered valid by Christians. However, even the Septuagint version, does not say worship the Son. It says let the Angels of God worship God (Yahweh).

The Bible insists that Yahweh alone is to be worshipped. In Deuteronomy ch .6, v. ~~16~~ 13, we read,

> "Worship Yahweh your God and serve him only."

Jesus, on whom be peace, believed in this, for he also stressed it in Luke ch. 4, v. 8. And Jesus too fell on his face and worshipped God (see Matthew 26:39).

Paul knew that Jesus worshipped God (see Hebrews 5:7), and Paul taught that Jesus will remain forever subservient to God (see 1 Corinthians, ch. 15, v. 28)

Part 6:

Evidence from the Fourth Gospel

The Gospel of John was completed to its present form some seventy years after Jesus was raised up to heaven. This Gospel in its final form says one more thing about Jesus that was unknown from the previous three Gospels — that Jesus was the Word of God. John means that Jesus was God's agent through whom God created everything else. This is often misunderstood to mean that Jesus was God Himself. But John was saying, as Paul had already said, that Jesus was God's first creature. In the Book of Revelation in the Bible, we find that Jesus is,

> "the beginning of God's creation" (ch. 3, v. 14; see also I Corinthians 8:6 and Colossians 1:15).

Anyone who says that the Word of God is a person distinct from God must also admit that the Word was created, for the Word speaks in the Bible saying:

> "Yahweh created me" (Proverbs ch. 8, v. 22).

This Gospel, nevertheless, clearly teaches that Jesus is not God. If it did not continue this teaching, then it would contradict the other three Gospels and also the letters of Paul from which it is clearly established that Jesus is not God.

We find here that Jesus was not co-equal with the Father, for Jesus said:

> "The Father is greater than I" (John 14:28).

People forget this and they say that Jesus is equal to the Father. Whom should we believe — Jesus or the people?

Muslims and Christians agree that God is self-existent. That means that He does not derive his existence from anyone. Yet John tells us that Jesus' existence is caused by the Father. Jesus says in this Gospel: "I live because of the Father" (John 6:57).

John tells us that Jesus did not have any authority of his own when he quotes Jesus as saying: "I can do nothing of my own authority" (John 5:30). This agrees with what we learn about Jesus from the other Gospels. In Mark, for example, we learn that Jesus performed miracles by a power which was not within his control. This is especially clear from an episode in which a woman is healed of her incurable bleeding. The woman came up behind him and touched his cloak; and she was immediately healed. But Jesus had no idea who touched him. Mark describes Jesus's actions thus:

> "At once Jesus realised that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" (Mark 5:30).

His disciples could not provide a satisfactory answer, so Mark tells us:

> "Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it" (5:32).

This shows that the power that healed the woman was not within Jesus's control. He knew that the power had gone out of him, but he did not know where it went. Some other intelligent being had to guide that power to the woman who needed to be healed. God was that intelligent being. It is no wonder, then, that in Acts of the Apostles we read that it was God who did the miracles through Jesus (Acts 2:22). God did extraordinary miracles through others too, but that does not make the others God (see Acts 19:11). Why, then, is Jesus taken for God?

Even when Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead, he had to ask God to do it. Lazarus' sister, Martha, knew this, for she said to Jesus:

> "I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask" (John 11:22).

Martha knew that Jesus was not God, and John who reported this with approval knew it also.

Jesus had a God, for when he was about to ascend to heaven, he said:

> "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20:17).

John was sure that no one had seen God, although he knew that many people had seen Jesus (see John 1:18 and 1 John 4:12). In fact Jesus himself told the crowds, that they have never seen the Father, nor have they heard the Father's voice (John 5:37). Notice that if Jesus was the Father, his statement here would be false.

Who is the only God in John's Gospel? The Father only. Jesus testified to this when he declared that the God of the Jews is the Father (John 8:54). And the God of the Jews is no other than Yahweh who declared that he is the only God. Jesus too confirmed that the Father alone is the only true God (see John 17:1-3). And Jesus said to his enemies: "You are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God" (Jn 8:40).

According to John, therefore, Jesus was not God, and nothing John wrote should be taken as proof that he was — unless one wishes to disagree with John.

Part 7:

Jesus and the Father Are Two Separate Beings

Many people use certain verses of the Bible as proof that Jesus is God. However, all of these verses, when understood in context, prove the opposite!

For example, in Matthew ch. 9, v. 2, Jesus said to a certain man, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." Because of this, some say that Jesus must be God since only God can forgive sins. However, if you are willing to read just a few verses further, you will find that the people "praised God, who had given such authority to men" (Matthew 9:8). This shows that the people knew, and Matthew agrees, that Jesus is not the only man to receive such authority from God. Jesus himself emphasized that he does not speak on his own authority (John 14:10) and he does nothing on his own authority, but he speaks only what the Father has taught him (John 8:28). What Jesus did here was as follows. Jesus announced to the man the knowledge Jesus received from God that God had forgiven the man. Notice that Jesus did not say, "I forgive your sins," but rather, "Your sins are forgiven," implying, as this would to his Jewish listeners, that God had forgiven the man. Jesus, then, did not have the power to forgive sins, and in that very episode he called himself "the Son of Man" (Matthew 9:6).

John 10:30 is often used as proof that Jesus is God because Jesus said, "I and the father are one." But, if you read the next six verses, you will find Jesus explaining that his enemies were wrong to think that he was claiming to be God. What Jesus obviously means here is that he is one with the Father *in purpose.*

Jesus also prayed that his disciples should be one just as Jesus and the Father are one. Obviously, he was not praying that all his disciples should somehow merge into one individual (see John 17:11, 22). And when Luke reports that the disciples were all one, Luke does not mean that they became one single human being, but that they shared a common purpose although they were separate beings (see Acts 4:32).

In terms of essence, Jesus and the Father are two, for Jesus said they are two witnesses (John 8:14-18). They have to be two, since one is greater than the other (see John 14:28).

When Jesus prayed to be saved from the cross, he said:

> "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

This shows that they had two separate wills, although Jesus submitted his will to the will of the Father. Two wills mean two separate individuals.

Furthermore, Jesus is reported to have said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). If one of them forsook the other, then they must be two separate entities.

Again, Jesus is reported to have said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). If the spirit of one can be placed into the hands of another, they must be two separate beings.

In all of these instances, Jesus is clearly subordinate to the Father. When Jesus knelt down and prayed he obviously was not praying to himself (see Luke 22:41). He was praying to his God.

Throughout the New Testament, the Father alone is called God. In fact, the titles "Father" and "God" are used to designate one individual, not three, and never Jesus. This is also clear from the fact that Matthew substituted the title "Father" in the place of the title "God" in at least two places in his Gospel (compare Matthew 10:29 with Luke 12:6, and Matthew 12:50 with Mark 3:35). If Matthew is right in doing so, then the Father alone is God.

Was Jesus the Father? No! Because Jesus said, "Do not call anyone on earth 'father', for you have one father, and he is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9). Since Jesus was standing on the earth when he said this, he is not the Father.

The Qur'an seeks to bring people back to the true faith that was taught by Jesus, and by his true disciples who continued in his teaching. That teaching emphasized a continued commitment to the first commandment that Yahweh alone is God. Yahweh, the only true God, is called Father in the New Testament, and Allah in the Qur'an. In the Qur'an, Allah directs His servants to call readers of the Bible back to that true faith. God says:

> "Say: 'O people of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall ascribe no partners unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for Lords beside Allah.'" (Qur'an 3:64).

God Begets Not Nor is He Begotten

Part 1:

Evidence from the Qur'an

A common mistake among people is their thinking of God as a super human being somewhere up in the sky. Then they attribute all kinds of human activity and relationships to God as if He was like human beings. Once it is clear that humans have children, such people conclude that God has children too. But God declares this idea to be false.

God tells us in His Book that there is nothing like Him (see surah 42:11). God also says that there is nothing comparable unto Him (112:4). Surely, God is not a physical being. God tells us:

> "Vision comprehends Him not, but He comprehends (all) vision" (Qur'an 6:103).

God declares that those who impute sons and daughters to Him do so falsely and without knowledge (see surah 6:100). The Qur'an appeals to our reason by saying:

> "The Originator of the heavens and the earth! How can He have a child when he has no consort, when He created all things and is Aware of all things?" (6:101)

This is in obvious reply to those who may claim that God has a literal son or daughter, terms which in human languages mean the offspring of a pair.

Some may say, however, that God can produce a child without having a consort. In that case, you are not speaking of a child but a creature of God. In any case, God declares that He begets not, nor is He begotten (surah 112:3).

Some may say that God has adopted a child. God declares that this idea too lacks reason. Since everyone already belongs to God, what then is the point of adopting? God says:

> "And they say: Allah has taken unto Himself a son. Be He glorified! Nay, but whatsoever is in the heaven and the earth are His. All are subservient unto Him. The originator of the heavens and the earth! When He decrees a thing, He says unto it only: Be! and it is" (2:116-117).

The idea that people should be called children of God is an erroneous one. Why not call them what they are? They are mortals of God's creating. To those who say, "We are the sons of Allah and His loved ones," Allah tells us to say as follows: "Why then does He chastise you for your sins? Nay, you are but mortals of His creating" (5:18).

God is not like humans to need children. God declares that He is self-sufficient. He has no need for such things (Qur'an 10:68).

It just so happens that people have a tendency to regard righteous persons as children of God. But God instructs us to call them not His children, but His righteous servants. God says:

> "And they say: The Beneficent has taken unto Himself a son. Be He glorified! Nay, but (those whom they call sons) are honoured slaves; they speak not until He has spoken, and they act by His command" (21:26-27).

In the next part we shall see that one such righteous servant of Allah is called Son of God by the people, although he himself did not call himself by this title but continually made it known that he is a servant of Allah.

Part 2:

The Messiah, Jesus Son of Mary

The Glorious Qur'an speaks highly of Jesus, on whom be peace, and reports nothing negative about him. Take, for instance the following quotation from the Glorious Qur'an where Allah says:

> "O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion, and do not say anything concerning Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers . . . " (Qur'an 4:171; see also 66:12).

In the above passage Jesus in called by four noble titles. He is the Messiah, the Messenger of Allah, a Word from

Allah, and a Spirit from Allah. In the same passage, it is clear that the Qur'an seeks to discourage exaggeration in religion. Further in the same passage, Allah says:

> "Allah is only One God. Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender" (Qur'an 4:171).

Refusing to call Jesus son of God is not done with a view to belittle Jesus. No! On the contrary, it is done to Glorify God, to magnify His name, and to proclaim His transcendent majesty.

The Qur'an confirms that Jesus was born of a virgin. When the angel announced to Mary, on whom be peace, that she will bear a child, she said:

> "My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal has touched me?

She received the following reply:

> "So (it will be). Allah creates what He will. If He decrees a thing, He says unto it only: Be! and it is. (Qur'an 3: 45, 47).

In another *surah,* after relating the incidents surrounding the birth of the Messiah, the Qur'an concludes as follows:

> "It befits not (the majesty of) Allah that He should take unto Himself a son. Glory be to Him! When he decrees a thing, He says unto it only: Be! and it is. (Qur'an 19:35).

The Qur'an seeks to correct a common misconception in the minds of people. Many assume that since Jesus had no father then God must be his father.

Glory be to Allah. He does not father children. He created everyone we know from a man and a woman. But He created Adam from neither a man nor a woman. And a man, but not from a woman. Then, as if to complete the picture, God created Jesus from a woman but not from a man. God has demonstrated His power to create in every way.

Allah says:

> "Lo! the likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created him from dust, then he said unto him: Be! and he is" (3:59).

It is important to realise that Jesus, on whom be peace, never taught that he is the Son of God. Allah says that those who call Jesus 'Son of God' are following the saying of other people (see surah 9:30). Jesus taught only what he was commanded (5:117). He himself was quite pleased with being a servant of Allah (4:172). As a messenger of Allah, Jesus knew that none in the heavens or the earth can approach Allah except as a slave (19:93).

Finally, those who say that God has a son should know that they have no warrant for this, but they are saying something without knowledge (10:68).

In the next part, God willing, we will see from a careful study of the Bible that Jesus never called himself God's son.

Part 3:

Changes in the Bible

It is easy to find many passages in the Bible where Jesus is called Son of God. One is also able to find a few passages where Jesus calls himself the Son of God, or where he calls God his father. However, a careful study of the Bible reveals that this is the result of changes in the Bible. Jesus never claimed that he is the Son of God.

Each time an older manuscript of the Bible is discovered, many changes are required in the Bible to bring it in line with the ancient manuscripts. Mark 1:1 reads as follows:

> "The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.[b]" (Mark 1:1, New International Version).

At the end of that verse, there is a small letter directing us to look at the footnote at the bottom of the page. There we find that some manuscripts do not have "the Son of God." And those were ancient, reliable manuscripts. The evidence was so compelling that the editors of one Bible just simply removed the title Son of God from the verse altogether. Thus in the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures the verse reads:

> "The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1).
>
> The title 'Son of God' is no longer in that verse.

Another such change had to be made in the Acts of the Apostles 8:37 in every honest translation of the Bible prepared in this century. Evidence from old manuscripts demanded that the verse be removed from all present Bibles. If you go to your New International Version Bible and look for Acts 8:37 you will not find it in the text. You will find verse number 36, and then verse 38, but not 37. If you wish to know what verse 37 used to say, you need to check the footnote at the bottom of the page. This verse used to contain a confession that Jesus is the Son of God. It had to be removed because its absence from the most ancient manuscripts meant that someone added it to the later manuscripts.

Some changes become evident just by comparing one Gospel with another in the present Bibles. You can do this investigation yourself. One example of this is the centurion's confession that Jesus is the Son of God as reported in Mark's Gospel as follows:

> "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39).

The same confession of the same centurion at the same scene, at the very moment, is reported in Luke also. But in Luke the Centurion is reported as saying:

> "Certainly this man was innocent" (Luke 23:47).

In Luke the title Son of God is missing. Mark and Luke cannot both be right here. The confession is reported incorrectly in at least one Gospel.

In the next part we will look at other such changes, especially in the Gospel of Matthew.

Part 4:

The Title "Son of God" in Matthew's Gospel

Students of the Bible will easily notice that the title Son of God is often used in Matthew without agreement from Mark and Luke. For example, what did the passers-by say at the scene of the cross? Their saying is reported in Mark 15:29-30 and also in Matthew 27:40. If you compare the two reports, you will notice that Matthew has added a phrase to the effect that Jesus is the Son of God.

We find another example of this in Matthew 14:22-33. Jesus had just miraculously fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. Then he sent his disciples to the other side of the sea. After praying to God, Jesus went out miraculously walking on the sea to meet his disciples. Eventually he got into the boat with them. How did the disciples react to all this? Mark and Matthew give us two different answers. Mark says:

> "And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened" (Mark 6:51-52).

In Matthew, however, the disciples were not perplexed at all. They had it all figured out and they knew exactly what to do. Matthew says:

> "And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God"" (Matthew 14:33).

Again, Matthew has improved the story to show that Jesus is the Son of God.

It may be useful here to see what Bible commentaries say about this difference. In Matthew's Gospel, the New American Bible has a footnote saying as follows:

> "This confession is in striking contrast to the Markan parallel where the disciples are "completely astounded"" (Revised New Testament, p. 35).

In the Pelican New Testament Commentaries, author John Fenton reminds us that in Mark the disciples were uncomprehending. Fenton then comments:

> "Matthew omits this, because in his Gospel the disciples are presented as men who have been given insight" (The Gospel of Saint Matthew, p. 247).

The difference here between Matthew and Mark was pointed out also in Harper's Bible Commentary. Commenting on Matthew, the editors say:

> "Instead of reacting, as in Mark, with incomprehension, the whole crew confesses Jesus as the Son of God" (1988 edition, p. 967).

So can we know what really happened? Commenting on the same passage in Matthew's Gospel, the Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible says:

> "The presence of Matthew's favorite phrase *little faith* suggests either that he has created this story or that he has reworked it to suit his purpose" (p. 627).

As we have said before, careful study reveals that the title Son of God is not one that Jesus claimed for himself. Nor did his true disciples call him by that title.

In the next part, God willing, we will point out some other changes which Bible students should know about.

Part 5:
Calling God "Father" in Matthew's Gospel

We have already seen in part 4 that Matthew was eager to add the title Son of God where it did not exist in Mark and Luke. Let us look at one more example of this. On one occasion, Jesus asked his disciples who they think he is. Peter's reply is recorded in Mark (8:29), Luke (9:20) and Matthew (16:~~6~~ 16) as follows:

> In Mark: "You are the Christ"
> In Luke: "You are the Christ of God"
> In Matthew: "You are the Christ, son of the living God."

Notice that Matthew has added the phrase "Son of the living God" to Peter's declaration.

The other side of calling Jesus 'Son of God' is to call God 'Father'. We find in the Gospels that the title Father is also added to the Bible in several places where it did not belong. Matthew was eager not only to call Jesus 'Son of God', but also to call God 'Father'. In Matthew 10:29, Jesus called God 'your Father'. The identical saying of Jesus is reported also in Luke with the significant difference that in Luke God is called God (see Luke 12:6).

Another example of this occurs in Matthew 10:32-33. There Jesus is reported to have said:

> "So every one who acknowledges me before men. I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33).

The very saying of Jesus is reported also in Luke, but the title "my Father" is not there. Once again, Matthew modified the saying of Jesus to convince his readers that Jesus is the Son of God.

Another example is the following saying of Jesus:

> "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mark 3:35).

That saying is also reported in Luke as follows:

> "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." (Luke 8:21)

The words vary in the two reports, but notice that in each case God was called God. But in the same saying of Jesus reported in Matthew, we will find that God is called 'my Father' (see Matthew 12:50). Once again, Matthew modified the saying of Jesus to help prove that Jesus is the Son of God.

We do not have space in this series to look at John's Gospel. But in a separate series we will show, with God's help, that even more changes occurred in John's Gospel.

In the next part we will see that Jesus was viewed by his earliest followers as the messiah and prophet of God, but never as Son of God.

Part 6:

Jesus is a Servant of God

The book of the Acts of the Apostles in the Bible is an important piece of evidence on the present subject. This book details the activity of the disciples over a period of thirty years after Jesus was raised up. It is important to see what the disciples were saying about Jesus, and what titles they used in referring to him.

It will be quickly obvious that they often referred to him as a servant of God, but never Son of God. Peter, for example, said:

> "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus" (Acts 3:13).

Peter further said:

> "God raised up his servant" (Acts 3:26), where the title servant refers to Jesus.

Not only Peter, but the entire group of believers viewed Jesus as God's servant. When they raised their voices together in prayer to God, in the course of their speaking to God they called Jesus "your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed" (Acts 4:27). They repeated this title also in verse 30. Consistently, Jesus was being called servant of God by the original followers of Jesus.

Some people mistakenly thought that the disciples called Jesus Son of God. An inconsistency of translation actually helped to give this wrong impression. In the King James

Bible, the translators call Jesus 'Son of God' in Acts 3:13, 26, and 'child of God' in Acts 4:27. They simply translated the Greek word *paida* as 'son' or 'child'. But the word *paida* also means 'servant', and the present context demands this translation since the author of Acts is trying in this passage to establish that Jesus is indeed the servant of God.

The translators knew that the Greek word *paida* means servant. When the same word was used for David in chapter 4, verse 25, they translated it 'servant'. Why not call Jesus also by the same title? Or, if they feel that 'son' is the correct translation, why not also call David 'Son of God'? Jesus and David are both called by the same title in Greek. Why not call them by a same title in English also?

Other translators recognised this inconsistency and corrected it in the modern translations of the Bible. Therefore the New International Version of the Bible and many others call Jesus Servant of God in the verses already quoted above. Nevertheless, the fact that Jesus was God's servant was so well known that even the King James Bible called him by this title in Matthew 12:18. Referring back to Isaiah 42:1, Matthew identified Jesus as the servant of the one true God Yahweh.

In the next part, we will see how the eagerness in some people to call Jesus 'Son of God' led them to invent explanations that indirectly insult God.

Part 7:

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

It was very clear to the earliest followers of Jesus that Jesus was a prophet like the other prophets who came before him (see Luke 4:24; John 6:14; Jn 9:17).

However, the Gospel writers were eager to teach that Jesus was not like other prophets, but that he was the Son of God. In their zeal, they did not stop to realise that their doctrine does not do justice to God. Some of what they reported in the Gospels reflect badly on God. But they did not seem to realise this. Take for example the parable of the wicked tenants reported in the first three Gospels.

The Gospels show that Jesus wanted to confront the Jews about their history of killing the prophets, and of their intention to kill him also. So he told them the following parable which clearly was about them. The story is as follows:

> "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some to the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty handed. Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some they beat, others they killed. He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and the inheritance will be ours.' So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others" (Mark 12:1-9).

In this parable, the wicked tenants represent the Jews, the servants represent the prophets whom God sent one after another; and the owner of the vineyard represents God.

The son obviously represents Jesus whom God sent last of all. So Jesus is shown to be different from the prophets. He is not one of the servants. He is a beloved son. At least that is what the Gospel writers are interested in showing.

Those who will analyze this story, however, will easily notice how foolish was the behaviour of the owner of the vineyard. He sent his servants one after another and, knowing that they were beaten and killed, nevertheless sent his beloved son to the same danger. Although he had full power to act, he did nothing until his son is definitely killed. He is also ignorant of the future. He naively assumes that the wicked servants will respect his son. So can anyone compare this foolish man to God? But that is what the story does. This is why it is clearly admitted in the Pelican New Testament Commentaries, St. Mark. p. 309, that it is unlikely that Jesus told this parable.

The whole idea of God having a son is objectionable to God. God considers it an insult to speak of Him in this way. Therefore, although we love Jesus, honour him, and believe in him, we should not call him 'Son of God'. And we should not compare God's plan with the plan of a man so foolish as the owner of the vineyard.

Jesus was a true prophet of God; he was the Messiah; and he spoke the truth. But he never claimed to be God's son.

The son obviously represents Jesus whom God sent last of all. So Jesus is shown to be different from the prophets. He is not one of the servants. He is a beloved son. At least that is what the Gospel writers are interested in showing.

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The whole idea of God having a son is objectionable to God. God considers it an insult to speak of Him in this way. Therefore, although we love Jesus, honour him and believe in him, we should not call him 'Son of God.' And we should not compare God's plan with the plan of a man

Some Misunderstood Verses of the Bible

Now Put Back in Their Contexts

"I and the Father are one"
And Other Verses Commonly
Misunderstood to Mean
That Jesus is God

"I and the Father are one"

John 10:30 is often quoted to show that Jesus is equal to God. But when you read the verse in its context you will find that the passage taken as a whole proves the opposite. People are often content to quote the verse in isolation to show that Jesus said "I and the Father are one" and then the Jews picked up stones to stone him because they understood him to mean that he is claiming to be God. It is only when you read the passage to see what comes before and after this verse that you will realise that the Jews misunderstood what Jesus was saying. In fact, Jesus tried to explain what he meant, and the explanation he gave is still in the Bible for everyone to see. It is surprising that so many people who say they love Jesus ignore his explanation and repeat the mistake which was made by the enemies of Jesus. Here is the passage as it appears in the New International Version of the Bible:

> [22]It was winter, [23]and Jesus was in the temple area, walking in Solomon's Colonnade. [24]The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."
>
> [25]Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, [26]but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. [27]My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. [28]I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. [29]My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. [30]I and the Father are one."
>
> [31]Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, [32]but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?"
>
> [33]"We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."
>
> [34]Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, `I have said you are gods'? [35]If he called them `gods' to whom the word of God came — and the scripture cannot be broken — [36]what about one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, `I am God's Son'?" (John 10:22-36).

The passage when viewed as a whole shows clearly that Jesus is not God. Let us observe the following points:

1. The disbelieving Jews insisted that Jesus should tell them if indeed he is the Christ so they should not remain in suspense about his identity (verse 24). A Christ as the title is used in the Bible refers to a human being who is anointed as King of Israel. The title is used for other humans as well (eg. Isaiah 45:1, Cyrus the Persian is called God's Christ). The Jews were expecting another Christ (Christ is a Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word Messiah, and the Arabic word Maseeh). So they asked Jesus whether he was the one they were waiting for. Jesus replied that he had already told them, and he even performed miracles in God's name to prove his claim to be the Christ (verse 25), yet they do not believe him (verse 26) because they are not Jesus' sheep (verse 26). Those whom the Father had given to Jesus, are Jesus' sheep (followers), and they believe Jesus when he said that he is the Christ (verses 27-29).

2. The true followers of Jesus will never perish, because Jesus gives them eternal life. According to the same Gospel (John 17:3), eternal life means to believe that the Father is the only true God, and that Jesus is the Christ and messenger of that one true God. Jesus gives this knowledge to all those whom the Father has given to him (chapter 17:2). What Jesus was speaking, then, were the words which, if believed, will mean eternal life for all those who believe in them. This is why in the same Gospel, Peter is quoted as saying on behalf of the disciples to Jesus, "You have the words of eternal life. We know and believe that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69). So they believed that Jesus was not God, but the Holy One whom God

sent (i.e. the Christ and Messenger of God). The Good News Bible makes this passage slightly plainer:

> You have the words that give eternal life. And now we believe and know that you are the Holy One who has come from God. (John 6:68-69)

3. No one can snatch away the disciples from Jesus (verse 28), because they were given to him by the Father, and the Father is greater than all (verse 29). Since the Father is helping Jesus to keep his disciples, no one can snatch them out of Jesus' hand just as they cannot snatch them out of the Father's hand. When Jesus said that he and the Father are one, he means exactly this: that the Father is helping him to accomplish his tasks; and when he is busy trying to save his disciples from being snatched away by the evil one, the Father is making sure that not one of them will be lost except, of course, the one who was to betray him.

4. Jesus said that the Father is greater than all (verse 29), including Jesus. Anyone having any doubt about this can read John 14:28 where Jesus declares: "The Father is greater than I." In spite of this clear statement of Jesus, many who claim to follow him insist that Jesus is equal to the Father. Whom should we believe — Jesus himself or those who claim to follow him? His true followers can be distinguished as the ones who stick to what Jesus himself said. Here is what Jesus directed his followers to do:

> If you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples. Then you shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:31-32)

5. When Jesus said, "I and the Father are one" (chapter 10, verse 30) the Jews picked up stones to stone him (verse 31). Jesus could not understand their behaviour, because he had said nothing wrong. So he asked them what he had done wrong to make them want to stone him (verse 32). They replied that Jesus had committed blasphemy since he was only a man yet he claimed to be God (verse 33). But it is clear from the Bible passage above that Jesus did not claim to be God. He only claimed to be the Christ (verse 25). When did he say he was God? They were deliberately misquoting Jesus and putting words in his mouth which they will try to use later as false evidence against him so they could have an excuse to kill him.

6. Jesus admits that he said, "I am God's Son" (verse 36). But he said that this means nothing more than the fact that God had set him apart as his very own and sent him into the world (verse 36). The fact that God set him apart means that God selected him for a task, set him apart from the rest. The Arabic title for a person like this is Mustafa (meaning *The Chosen One*). All of God's Prophets deserve this title. The fact that God sent him into the world means that he is God's Messenger. He is sent with a message from God. Obviously, the God who sent Jesus is not Jesus himself.

7. Jesus tried to explain to them that even if he said something which they misinterpreted as meaning that Jesus is claiming to be God, they should realise that some human beings were called 'gods' in the Bible, and the Jews do not disagree with this (verse 35), so they should not disagree with Jesus so quickly before he gets a chance to explain his words. To get a fuller understanding of what Jesus is saying here, let us

refer to the Bible passage to which he called their attention. The passage is in the 82nd Psalm:

> "I said, `You are "gods";
> you are all sons of the Most High.'
> But you will die like mere men;
> you will fall like every other ruler."
> (Psalms 82:7-8)

The passage from the Psalms shows that God had honoured some humans by calling them "gods." But of course they were not really gods. This is just a figurative expression used in the Bible. Jesus reminded the Jews of this so that they should understand that even if he says something that makes them think he is claiming to be God, they should take it as a figurative expression that does not mean what it sounds like. Furthermore Jesus clarified that what he actually said was that he was God's Son (verse 36). He says that if others can be called "gods," he does not see why they object to him calling himself God's Son which means that God had selected him and sent him with a message for the people.

The clear meaning of the passage, then, is that Jesus is not God. He is one selected by God (i.e. he is Mustafa) and he is sent by God (i.e. he is God's Messenger). When he calls himself God's Son he means nothing more than that.

Yet, despite the detailed study of the passage as above, some will hold on to tradition and reject the explanation that Jesus provided in verses 34-36. They will insist on taking verse 30 out of its context and give it a meaning which Jesus said is the wrong meaning. They will then agree with what the Jews said and disagree with what Jesus said. This attitude leads to confusion, as we will presently see.

Even if verse 30 is taken in isolation to change its meaning from what Jesus meant, it does not solve anything. It only raises more problems. Jesus cannot be one and the same as the Father whereas he said himself that the Father is greater than he (John 14:28). Jesus said that he and the Father are in fact two (John 8:14-18). And no one had seen God at any time although they had already seen Jesus (1 John 4:12). The best solution for all this is to go back to the teachings of Jesus himself, then you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free (John 8:31-32).

Before Abraham was, I am

John 8:58 is one of the most misused verses of the Bible. Because Jesus in that verse says "Before Abraham was, I am," two implications, one unnecessary, and the other false, are drawn from that verse. The unnecessary implication is that since Jesus existed before Abraham that means he existed always. This is a preconceived notion that people force into the text. "Before Abraham" does not mean "always". Melchezidek in the Bible is shown to have existed before Abraham (Hebrews 7:3). Does that mean that Melchezidek is God? Obviously, we cannot take a created being as God.

The false implication is that Jesus by saying "I am" was uttering God's name which God declared to Moses in Exodus 3:14-15.

The Bible is confusing on this point because it gives three versions of God's calling Moses, and the three versions do not agree with each other. The best that can be said is that the name of God announced there is Yahweh. Compare the three versions below:

1. The Yahwist version (Exod 6:28 - 7:7) says nothing

about the name of God being revealed because for the Yahwist editors the name Yahweh was already known among the Israelites. They say that this name was being used since the time of Enosh, the grandson of Adam (Genesis 4:26).

2. The priestly version (Exod 6:2-13) contradicts this by saying that this name was not known before (Exod 6:2). God's command to Moses here is

> So say to the Israelites, "I am Yahweh . . ." (Exod 6:6),

and Moses repeated this to them (6:9).

3. But in the Elohist version (Exod 3:13-22) God's instruction to Moses is different:

> This is what you are to say to the Israelites. "I am has sent me to you" (Exod 3:15).

14

It would appear from this that God's name is "I am," but it is clear upon careful study that in this passage the Elohist scribes substituted "I am" for "Yahweh" in the same instruction given in (Exod 6:6).

Even if God really did announce his name to be "I am" as in Exodus, chapter 3, verse 15, this still does not prove that Jesus applied the name "I am" to himself. Jesus never said his name is "I am". He is quoted as saying "Before Abraham was I am" (John 8:58). If "I am" is Jesus' name, then we should be able to replace the "I am" in this passage with "Jesus," since these are both names of Jesus. The passage would then read as follows: "Before Abraham was, Jesus." This, of course, makes no sense because the idea that Jesus called himself "I am" is not there in the text, but it is someone's own interpretation forced into the text. Notice that we would have no difficulty replacing the "I am" in Exodus 3:15 with either "God" or "Yahweh", as follows:

> This is what you are to say to the Israelites. "**God** has sent me to you" (Exod 3:15).
>
> This is what you are to say to the Israelites. "**Yahweh** has sent me to you" (Exod 3:15).

Another point worth paying attention to is this: the writer of the fourth gospel never believed Jesus to be God. This proves that Jesus never said he is God. Otherwise, how could it be possible that the author of the fourth gospel never knew it? He believed that the Father is the only true God, and that Jesus is the Christ and messenger of God (see John 17:3).

Furthermore, a distinction which is present in the Greek version of the Bible is lost from the English versions. In the Septuagint Greek version of the Old Testament, the phrase translated "I am" is *"ho on"* in the Greek. If the author of the fourth Gospel wanted to show his readers that Jesus repeated the phrase, he would no doubt have quoted Jesus as saying, "Before Abraham was, *ho on.*" But he did not. Instead, he quoted Jesus as saying, "Before Abraham was, *ego eimi.*" Readers of his Greek manuscript, then, would have seen that Jesus' statement in John 8:58 is different from God's statement in Exodus 3:15. And this, of course, is what the author of the fourth Gospel intended.

Furthermore, the Syriac Peshitta version of the Bible, one of the old versions of the Bible, reads in John 8:58, "Before Abraham was, I was." Was this changed from what the author wrote? How can we know? Suppose this was the original phrase, then those who rest their case on the common rendering will be disappointed on the

Day of Judgement. Why not rest our case on a much more plain verse of the Bible — one in which Jesus clearly differentiates between himself and God? Take this one for example, where Jesus says to his enemies:

> You are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God" (John 8:~~31~~ 40).

Who is Jesus then? A man who told the truth which he heard from God. In other words, he was a messenger of God. When a clear statement like this is issued from the lips of Jesus, why wrangle with the passages that are not so clear, and try to twist them to mean the opposite of what Jesus has been saying in other clear verses all along?

Anyone who wishes to convince himself/herself that Jesus is God should look for clear evidence in the Bible to show that Jesus is God. But the clear evidence is to the contrary. The Bible teaches again and again that Jesus is not God, but a Servant of God (e.g. Matthew 12:18).

In the very next chapter of John, chapter 9, v.35, Jesus declares that he is the son of man (RSV). And anyone who knows the Bible as the Israelites to whom Jesus spoke will know that a son of man cannot be God. The Bible declares that God is neither a man nor a son of man (Numbers 23:19).

> How can he be called clean that is born of a woman? Behold even the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight. How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm? (Job 25:4-6)

A Virgin Will Give Birth

Isaiah 7:14 is one of the most misunderstood verses of the Bible. This passage in a defective translation reads: "a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." The word Immanuel means "God is with us" (see Good News Bible, p. 673). Now, because Matthew (ch.1, v. 23) applies this prophecy to Jesus, it is mistakenly believed that this proves Jesus is God.

First, Matthew never meant to portray Jesus as God. The belief in Jesus divinity was formulated long after Matthew's gospel was written. Matthew's gospel proves throughout that Jesus was a servant of God (e.g. Mt. 12:18; 24:36; 27:46).

Second, the name given to an individual in the Bible cannot prove that he is God. "Elijah" means "Jehovah God." Does that prove that Elijah is Jehovah God? Absolutely Not. Similarly, the name Immanuel does not prove that Jesus is God with us. Neither does the name "Elihu" (meaning "God himself") prove that the name Elihu is God himself (see I Sam 1:1).

Third, although the prophecy is taken, in Matthew 1:23 to refer indirectly to Jesus, the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 actually refers directly to a child born during the lifetime of the prophet Isaiah. That child was called "Immanuel", meaning "God is with us," and he was God's sign given to King Ahaz that God will help King Ahaz and his people. God's promise to King Ahaz, in the 7th chapter of Isaiah, is that before the child is old enough to distinguish right from wrong the enemy kings will be defeated by God's help. You have to read the entire chapter to get the full meaning. It is not right to pull one verse out of context and give it a different meaning. That child was indeed born, and God called him Immanuel (Isaiah 8:8). If King Ahaz had to wait seven hundred years for Jesus to be born before God's help comes, he and his people would be long dead before God's help comes. What, then, will be the significance of such a promise? The promise had a timely fulfillment. The prophecy referred not to Jesus who was to be born hundreds of years later, but to a child who was born in the time of King Ahaz.

A further point to notice is that the child spoken of in Isaiah will at first not be able to differentiate between good and evil. Those who say that Jesus was that child should not turn around and say that Jesus is God, because there has never been (and will never be) a time when God does not know the difference between good and evil.

Matthew mistakenly applied this prophecy to Jesus because Jesus was born of a virgin, and the text speaks of a virgin giving birth. Matthew was relying on the Greek Septuagint version of the Bible where in Isaiah 7:14 the Greek word "parthenos" meaning "virgin" is used. But the book of Isaiah was originally written in Hebrew. To find Isaiah's meaning it is necessary to go back to the original language than to refer to a translation alone. The Hebrew manuscripts has instead of "virgin" the Hebrew word "almah" meaning "a young woman of marriageable age." If the writer of Isaiah wanted to say "virgin" he would have used the Hebrew word "bethulah" meaning "virgin". But he did not. This is why the Revised Standard Version of the Bible (and many other versions) read "young woman" instead of "virgin".

Jesus was indeed born of a virgin; both the Bible and the Qur'an confirms that. But Isaiah chapter 7, verse 14, does not speak of a virgin birth, and does not refer to Jesus. Jesus is never called "Immanuel" in the Bible. The angel announced his name as "Jesus" (Luke 1:31).

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father

In **John 14:9** Jesus (peace be upon him) is quoted as saying: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” This is often misunderstood to mean that Jesus is God. But Jesus clearly said that no one has seen God at any time (John 5:37). Those who say that Jesus is God, are disagreeing with what Jesus himself said. If Jesus was God why would he say to the people looking at him that they never saw God? And why would the author of the 1st Letter of John in the Bible, writing some seventy years after Jesus was taken up, say that no one had ever seen God (1John 4:12) although he knew that multitudes had already seen Jesus? The meaning of John 14:9 is not that Jesus is God, but that by knowing Jesus, one gets to know God, since Jesus teaches about God. This meaning is confirmed by John 1:18 where the writer says that no one had ever seen God, but Jesus had made God known to the people. In the 17th Chapter of the same Gospel, Jesus declared that eternal life means knowing that the Father whom Jesus worshipped is the only true God and that Jesus is the Messiah who was sent by God.

He was manifest in the flesh

1 Timothy 3:16 is often quoted to show that “God was manifest in the flesh.” This is how it appears in later manuscripts of the Bible. The earlier and more reliable manuscripts (Notably Codex Sinaiticus and Codex

Vaticanus) read "He was manifest in the flesh," and "He" from the context clearly refers to Jesus. This passage does not show that Jesus was God. It reflects Paul's doctrine that Jesus before he appeared in the flesh was a being higher than men but lower than God. "The head of every man is Christ, the head of every woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God," writes Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:3.

Mighty God, Everlasting Father

Isaiah 9:6 speaks of one whose name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. We are often told that this is a prophecy about Jesus, and that it proves that Jesus is God. But the problem this prophecy presents cannot be ignored by any honest person. If it is taken literally then Jesus is the "Everlasting Father." But Jesus clearly taught that he was not the Everlasting Father. According to Matthew, while Jesus was on the earth he declared:

> Do not call anyone on earth "father," for you have one father, and he is in heaven. (Matthew 23:9, New International Version).

If Jesus was not the "Everlasting Father," neither was he "Mighty God." Either we take the passage literally in which case it contradicts the clear teaching of Jesus, or we take it figuratively, in which case "Everlasting Father" doesn't really mean "Everlasting Father," and "Mighty God" doesn't really mean "Mighty God."

Was Jesus Perfect God and Perfect Man at the Same Time?

According to Orthodox Christian belief, Jesus was perfect man and perfect God at the same time. This belief is necessary for salvation according to the Athanasian creed held dear by most Christians. Modern Christian scholars reject this idea not because it is difficult to understand but because it cannot be meaningfully expressed. The doctrine cannot be stated in any way that is free from contradictions. It is impossible for Jesus to have been perfect man and perfect God at the same time, for this would mean that he was finite and infinite at the same time, that he was fallible and infallible at the same time. This cannot be.

What the creed denies is also quite significant. The creed was formulated in response to the claims of various early Christian groups, and so includes clauses that deny the beliefs of those groups. In response to the Arians who believed that Jesus was not God, the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.) decreed that he was fully God. In response to the Apollinarians who believed Jesus was God but not fully human, the council of Constantinople (381 A.D.) decreed that Jesus was fully human.

Then there was Nestorianism: the belief that started when Nestorius denied that Mary could be called “Mother of God.” To him, Mary was mother of the human Jesus only. This implied that there were two Christs: one divine, the other human. Against Nestorius, the council of Ephesus (431 A.D.) decreed that the two natures of Jesus cannot be separated. Everything Jesus does is done by both the humanity and divinity in him. Likewise, everything that happened to him happened to both the man and God that he is. Therefore Mary gave birth to both, both died on the cross, etc.

At yet another council, the council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) the creed received some finishing touches and the Athanasian creed was declared official church teaching. Most Christians are not familiar with the detailed implications of the creed and in their own minds conceive of Jesus in the very ways the creed was formulated to deny. This tendency results from the fact that the creed’s definition of Jesus is impossible for any human mind to comprehend. One can only repeat the words, but cannot grasp the meaning of the required belief. Therefore most just repeat the creed with their lips but in their minds turn to views of Jesus that are less taxing on the intellect, even though those views were declared by the Church to be heretical.

The orthodox doctrine is logically impossible. As Huston Smith, scholar of comparative religion, points out, it would not have been logically impossible if the creed said that Jesus was somewhat divine and somewhat human. But this is expressly what the creed denies. For orthodox Christians, Jesus cannot possess only some human qualities; he must possess all. He must be fully human. At the same time, he cannot possess only some divine qualities; he must have all. He must be fully divine. This is impossible because to be fully divine means one has to be free of human limitations. If he has only one human limitation then he is not God. But according to creed he has every human limitation. How, then, can he be God?

Huston Smith calls this a blatant contradiction. In his book The World's Religions, he writes:

> We may begin with the doctrine of the Incarnation, which took several centuries to fix into place. Holding as it does that in Christ God assumed a human body, it affirms that Christ was God-Man; simultaneously both fully God and fully man. To say that such a contention is paradoxical seems a charitable way to put the matter — it looks more like a blatant contradiction. If the doctrine held that Christ was half human and half divine, or that he was divine in certain respects, while being human in others, our minds would not balk. (*The World's Religions*, p. 340).

If it was said that Jesus was partly human and partly divine that would not be logically impossible but only scripturally impossible. The Bible nowhere teaches that Jesus was divine in any way. Furthermore, if he was only partly divine then he was not the One True God of the Old and New Testaments. God is All-Powerful, not somewhat all-powerful; God is All-Knowing, not somewhat all-knowing.

C. Randolph Ross is a Christian. In his book *Common Sense Christianity* he debunks the orthodox view "not because it is difficult to understand," he says, but because "it cannot meaningfully be said." He rejects it because "it is impossible," he says. *(Common Sense Christianity, p. 79)*. His arguments are so persuasive that I can do little better than just repeat them. To be human means to be limited, lacking in knowledge, prone to mistakes, imperfect. To be God means just the opposite: unlimited, complete in knowledge, infallible, perfect. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot say of one person that he was both. Either he was one or the other.

THIS IS NO PARADOX

To those who say this is a paradox, Ross answers nicely. It is important to understand first of all what is a paradox. A paradox is something that seems impossible but can be demonstrated to be true. On the other hand, the creedal statement may seem true to some people but logic demonstrates it to be false. Ross argues with an example that makes the point succinct:

> "Ah!" some will say. "That's the paradox!" No, it isn't a paradox. This is a very important point, so please take special note: a paradox is something which seems impossible but which is demonstrably true. Thus, it was a paradox when some scientist carefully analyzed bumblebees and concluded that according to the laws of physics they couldn't fly. There was contradiction and apparent impossibility, but bumblebees kept on flying.
>
> However, for an individual to be both perfect and imperfect is the reverse of this: it may seem true to some, but it is demonstrably impossible. And not just impossible according to our understanding of the laws of nature, which can be wrong (as with the bumblebee), but impossible according to the rules of logic upon which all our reasoning is based. (p. 82)

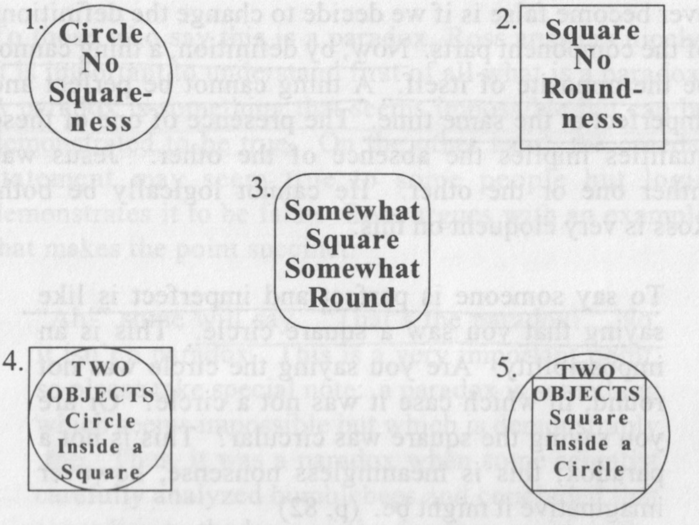
Let me elaborate this last point. Human observation and analysis can turn out to be incorrect. This was the case with the scientist who figured that according to the laws of Physics bumblebees could not fly. The flaw in his procedure is that our understanding of the laws of nature is always improving. New knowledge often declare old to be false. But with the rules of logic things are different. What is true by definition will always remain true unless we start redefining things. For example, 2+2=4. This equation will always remain true. The only way this can ever become false is if we decide to change the definitions of the component parts. Now, by definition, a thing cannot be the opposite of itself. A thing cannot be perfect and imperfect at the same time. The presence of one of these qualities implies the absence of the other. Jesus was either one or the other. He cannot logically be both. Ross is very eloquent on this:

> To say someone is perfect and imperfect is like saying that you saw a square circle. This is an impossibility. Are you saying the circle was not round, in which case it was not a circle? Or are you saying the square was circular? This is not a paradox; this is meaningless nonsense, however imaginative it might be. (p. 82)

To develop this point further, I tried to relate it to what can and cannot be said about Jesus according to the creed. In the diagram we see a figure that is somewhat round and somewhat square. It is unorthodox to say that Jesus was somewhat man and somewhat God. Even the models that combine a circle and a square one inside the other do not work, for in each case you have two objects clearly separable. Orthodoxy does not allow this for the two natures of Jesus. To satisfy the requirements of orthodoxy we must find an object which is at once a circle and a square. By definition, such an object cannot exist (see accompanying diagram, next page).

The difficulty is not with believing what the creed says. The problem is that the creed in effect says nothing. When

FIVE MODELS THAT FAIL TO DEMONSTRATE THE TWO NATURES OF CHRIST IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY


1.
Circle No Squareness
2.
Square No Roundness
3.
Somewhat Square Somewhat Round
4.
TWO OBJECTS Circle Inside a Square
5.
TWO OBJECTS Square Inside a Circle

THE ONE MODEL THAT WOULD WORK COULD YOU IMAGINE IT? IS IT LOGICALLY POSSIBLE?

6. Perfect circle
and
perfect square
at the same time

we are told two opposites what then are we to believe? Ross puts it nicely:

> To say that someone is perfect and imperfect at the same time is to say that "X" and "not-X" can both be true. This is either to abandon the meaning

> of these words or else to abandon logic, and in either case this means we are speaking nonsense that can have no meaning for us. (p. 82)

The orthodox say that Jesus was imperfect with regards to his human nature but perfect with regards to his divine nature. The problem with this position is that it implies the existence of two persons occupying the one body of Jesus: one perfect, the other imperfect. You need for this two minds, two wills, two characters. But the creed does not allow this necessary conclusion and insists that Jesus was not two persons but one only. Now, this one person had to be either perfect or not, infallible or not, unlimited in knowledge or not. You cannot say of the same person that he was both.

When Jesus faced death on the cross according to Christian belief, either he faced it with the human belief that he would be raised on the third day, or he faced death with the infallible knowledge that he would be so raised. If he believed with human faith in God's power to raise him then he himself was not God. If, on the other hand, he faced death with infallible divine knowledge that he would be resurrected, then he was not taking any real risk in letting himself die. If the divine nature in him knew he would be raised, but he did not know this, then it was not his divine nature. If the divine nature knew something he did not, we are back to two persons.

This could get more difficult to explain as we look at the deeds reported of Jesus in the gospels and ask whether the divine or human nature or both performed those deeds. Let us consider the episode where Jesus curses the fig tree. First, the account as it appears in Mark:

> Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves,

> because it was not the season for figs. The he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." (Mark 11:12-14, NIV)

As a result, the tree withered from the roots (v. 20). Now, a few things are clear from this episode.

1. Jesus did not know the tree had no fruit until he went up to the tree and found nothing but leaves.
2. When Jesus saw leaves from a distance he hoped to find fruit on the tree.
3. It was not fig season, and this is why the tree had no figs. This comment from Mark clearly, implies that it was a perfectly good tree. If the tree was barren, Mark's comment about the season would have been pointless and misleading.
4. Jesus did not know it was not fig season. If he had known this, he would not have expected the tree to have fruit, and he would not have cursed the tree for having no fruit.
5. The whole thing began when Jesus felt hungry.

Now it is easy to understand that the human Jesus felt hunger, and that the human Jesus did not know it was not fig season and so mistakenly expected the tree to have fruit. A divine Jesus would have known all these, and would not have to go to the tree to discover it had no fruit; he would not have been hungry in the first place.

Now the cursing of the tree is a little more difficult for those who assert the divinity of Jesus. His miracles, they say, are performed by his divine nature. Okay, so the divine Jesus cursed the tree. But why? Why ruin a tree which in Mark's view was a perfectly good tree? Come fig season this tree would have had fruit and others could have eaten from it. The reason was that the human Jesus made a mistake. But why did the divine Jesus act upon the mistake of the human Jesus? Does the human mind in Jesus guide the divine nature in him? Actually, there is no warrant for all this speculation, for scripture nowhere says that Jesus has two natures. Those who want to believe contrary to scripture that Jesus was fully human yet fully divine can go on speculating.

Some will say that everything is possible with God, and that we are using words here with their human meanings. This is true. Everything is possible with God. We believe that. If you tell me God did such and such and He is such and such I cannot say it is impossible. But what if you say "God did and did not," or "He is and is not?" Your statements are meaningless. When you say that Jesus is perfect God and perfect man at the same time you are saying two opposite things. Therefore, I reply, "Impossible!"

So what we need here is to hear it said with meaning. If you think that the words have a different or deeper meaning, when applied to God I cannot help agreeing with you. But I would like to know with what meaning you are using those words. Ross explains:

> If you wish to redefine some of these words, that's fine, as long as you can tell us the new meanings that you are using. The usual practice, however, seems to be to say that while one cannot say precisely what these new meanings are, one is nevertheless sure that they fit together in a way that makes sense. This, of course, is simply an effort to duck the requirements of logic. But if you do not know the meanings of the words which you are applying to Jesus, then you are simply saying "Jesus is X" and "Jesus is Y," X and Y being unknowns. This, of course, is to say nothing at all. (p. 83)

As a result of this confusion, many Christians revert to the idea that Jesus had two natures that are separable. Sometimes he acts as a human and sometimes he acts as God. This, of course, is not supported by scripture, and it would have been wiser to move to the scriptural position that Jesus was a man and a servant of God (See Matthew 12:18, Acts 3:13, Acts 4:27 in the Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version).

William Ellery Channing is one of many Christians who have moved to that scriptural position. He wrote thus:

> Where do you meet, in the New Testament, the phraseology which abounds in Trinitarian books and which necessarily grows from the doctrine of two natures in Jesus? Where does this divine teacher say, "this I speak as God, and this as man; this is true only of my human mind, this only of my divine?" Where do we find in the Epistles a trace of this strange phraseology? Nowhere. It was not needed in that day. It was demanded by the errors of a later age.
>
> We believe, then that Christ is one mind, one being, and, I add, a being distinct from the one God. That Christ is not the one God, not the same being with the father, is a necessary inference from our former head, in which we saw that the doctrine of three persons in God is a fiction . . . . Jesus, in his preaching, continually spoke of God. The word was always in his mouth. We ask, does he by this word ever mean himself? We say, never. On the contrary, he most plainly distinguishes between God and himself, and so do his disciples. (William Ellery Channing, *Unitarian Christianity and Other Essays*, edited by Irving H. Bartlett (U.S.: Liberal Arts Press, 1957) pp. 17-18)

Channing contends that since the doctrine of the two natures is “so strange, so difficult, so remote from all the previous conceptions of men,” it would have been taught with utmost clarity in the Bible had it been a necessary belief for Christians. But no such teaching can be found in the Bible. Some Christians say, however, that some passages ascribe divine qualities to Jesus and others human qualities. To reconcile all these necessitates the said doctrine. Channing replies that those passages that seem to ascribe divine qualities to Jesus can be easily explained without resorting to the doctrine. He regards with disdain what he understands to be the solution proposed by other Christians:

> In other words, for the purpose of reconciling certain difficult passages, which a just criticism can in a great degree, if not wholly, explain, we must invent a hypothesis vastly more difficult, and involving gross absurdity. We are to find our way out of a labyrinth by a clue which conducts us into mazes infinitely more inextricable. (p. 17)

Many, like Channing, after thorough study have concluded that Jesus was simply a man chosen by God to deliver His message. The mighty works he did were by the permission and aid of God. Jesus of his own could do nothing. The book *The Myth of God Incarnate,* edited by John Hick, is a collection of essays written by practicing Christian theologians and clergymen. Anyone who still has a doubt about this matter should read that book.

Finally, we must turn to God for His guidance. He sent His final book, the Qur’an to rescue mankind from the theological traps of humanly invented dogmas. The Qur’an addresses Christians and Jews:

> O people of the Scripture! Now hath Our

> Messenger come unto you, expounding unto you much of that which ye used to hide of the Scripture, and forgiving much. Now hath come unto you light from Allah and a plain Scripture, whereby Allah guideth him who seeketh His good pleasure unto paths of peace. He bringeth them out of darkness into light by His decree, and guideth them unto a straight path. (Qur'an 5:14-15)

And again:

> Say: O People of the Scripture! Stress not in your religion other than the truth, and follow not the vain desires of the folk who erred of old and led many astray, and erred from the plain road. (Qur'an 5:77)

Let us pray to Allah for His help. Nothing is possible without His help. O Allah! Guide us and guide all of humankind on the straight path.

Some Forgotten Sayings of Jesus

Any believer can call God "Father" according to the Bible

Jesus, at the end of his mission, made it clear that God is not only his father, but father of all, and God of all, and even his own God whom he worshipped throughout his earthly career. He said:

> "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." (John 20:17 RSV 1952)

The writer is Paul aslo made it clear that any believer can address God as "Father." He wrote:

> "We cry, Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15 KJV 1611).

Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples:

> ". . . Do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. (Matthew 23:1,9 NIV 1984)

According to Matthew, Jesus taught the crowds to call God 'Father'. He said to them:

> "This, then, is how you should pray:
> 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name . . .' " (Matthew 6:9 NIV)

Jesus made it clear that he is not God when he said:

> "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." (Mark 10:18)

A man had ran up and knelt before Jesus and called him "Good Teacher." Jesus used the opportunity to make it clear to people that they must not praise him more than a human being deserves to be praised.

Jesus depends on God for Authority: God depends on no one. Jesus said:

> "I can do nothing of my own authority" (John 5:30).

> "I do as the Father has commanded me" (John 14:31 RSV).

Needless to say, God does not receive commands from anyone. Jesus said:

> "The words that I say to you I do not speak of my own authority." (John 14:10 RSV)

> "I do nothing of my own authority but speak thus as the Father has taught me." (John 8:28 RSV)

God has full authority, and full knowledge. He cannot be taught, but He teaches.

Jesus is not Equal to "The Father"

Jesus said:

> "The Father is greater than I" (John 14:28 RSV).

People forget this and they say that Jesus is equal to the Father. Whom should we believe—Jesus or the people?

Jesus Does Not Know Everything

Speaking of the Last Day, Jesus said:

> "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" (Matthew 24:36).

Did Jesus Raise Himself up?

God raised him up. (Acts 2:24)

Jesus did not have power to raise himself up. God had to raise him up, as the author of Acts says.

Jesus prayed to God: God prays to no one. Jesus prayed, saying:

> "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt." (Mark 14:3~~2~~)
> 36

Jesus fell on his face and prayed to God, begging God to save him from crucifixion. This also shows that Jesus had a will different from God's will. The writers of Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us that it was Jesus's wish to be saved from crucifixion, but it was God's will to let the crucifixion take place. This shows that Jesus had a will different from the will of God, at least for a moment. Therefore he was not God. He declared in a moment of desperation:

> "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)

Jesus did not know the tree had no fruit

> He [Jesus] was hungry. And on seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it , he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs (Mark 11 12-13).

When he saw that the tree had leaves, he thought that he might find fruit on it. But when he came up close to the tree he realised there were no fruits. After all, it was not even fig season.

Bible calls Jesus Servant of God

> "Behold my servant whom I have chosen." (Matthew 12:18 In this passage God calls Jesus His servant)

> "The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus" (Acts 3:13).

> For truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus. . . (Acts 4:27).

Everyone, except for God, are God's servants. Jesus, too, is God's servant.

Who was real Worker of Miracles?

Bible says it was God who did the miracles through Jesus:

> Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: (Acts 2:22 KJV)

People say that since Jesus worked many miracles, he must be God. But here we see that God did the miracles; Jesus was the instrument God used to accomplish His work. Jesus was a man whom God approved of. This means he was a righteous man.

Jesus cannot guarantee positions

> "To sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father" (Matthew 20:23).

Therefore if we want to secure our position with God in the life hereafter we must turn to God and ask Him.

A Misunderstood saying

I and the Father are one. (John 10:30)

People like to quote this saying, but they forget the following saying:

> John 17:11: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are."

This shows that what was meant was one in purpose, not one in substance as people think. The disciples could not become one human, but they can pursue the same goal. That is to say, they can be one in purpose, just as Jesus and the Father are one in purpose.

Did Jesus say everything John says he said?

Consider the following sayings of Jesus found in John's Gospel alone:

John 14:9: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."
John 6:35: "And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life."
John 8:12: "I am the light of the world."
John 8:58: "Before Abraham was, I am."
John 10:7: "I am the door of the sheep."
John 11:25: "I am the resurrection, and the life."

John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life."
John 15:1: "I am the true vine."

Christian scholars tell us that if Jesus had made all these fantastic claims about himself, the first three gospels would surely have recorded them. Mark was written around 70 C.E., followed by Matthew and Luke somewhere between 80-90 C.E. John, written around 100 C.E., was the last of the four canonized gospels. The Christian scholar James Dunn writes in his book *The Evidence for Jesus:*

> "If they were part of the original words of Jesus himself, how could it be that *only* John picked them up and *none* of the others? Call it scholarly skepticism if you like, but I find it almost incredible that such sayings should have been neglected *had* they been known as a feature of Jesus' teaching. If the 'I ams' had been part of the original tradition, it is very hard indeed to explain why none of the other three evangelists made use of them." (*The Evidence for Jesus*, p. 36)

Similarly, the *New American Bible* tells us in its introduction, under the heading *How to Read Your Bible:*

> "It is difficult to know whether the words or sayings attributed to Jesus are written exactly as he spoke them. . . .
> The Church was so firmly convinced that . . . Jesus . . . taught through her, that she expressed her teaching in the form of Jesus' sayings." (*St. Joseph Medium Size Edition,* p.23)

What we have in John, then is what people were saying about Jesus at the time John was written (about 70 years after Jesus was raised up). The writer of John simply expressed those ideas as if Jesus had said them. Rev. James Dunn says further in his book that, almost certainly, the writer of the fourth gospel

> "was not concerned with the sort of questions which trouble some Christians today — Did Jesus actually say this? Did he use these precise words? and so on." (*The Evidence for Jesus*, p. 43)
>
> Scholars have concluded that this gospel was originally written in a simple form. But this gospel was later on, as the New Jerusalem Bible says, "amplified and developed in several stages during the second half of the first century." (*The New Jerusalem Bible: Introduction to John*, p. 1742)

It says further:

> "It is today freely accepted that the fourth Gospel underwent a complex development before it reached its final form." (p. 1742)

On a previous page, the same Bible says:

> "It would seem that we have only the end-stage of a slow process that has brought together not only component parts of different ages, but also corrections, additions and sometimes even more than one revision of the same discourse." (The *New Jerusalem Bible*, p. 1739)

The *New American Bible* says that most scholars "have come to the conclusion that the inconsistencies were probably produced by subsequent editing in which homogeneous materials were added to a shorter original." (*The New American Bible, Revised New Testament*, p. 143)

God Reveals the Truth About Jesus

O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not "Three" — Cease! (it is) better for you! — Allah is only One God. Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that he should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender.

The Messiah will not scorn to be a slave unto Allah, nor will the favoured angels. Whoso scorneth His service and is proud, all such will He assemble unto Him:

Then, as for those who believed and did good works, unto them will He pay their wages in full, adding unto them of His bounty; and as for those who were scornful and proud, them will He punish with a painful doom.

And they will not find for them, against Allah, any protecting friend or helper.

O mankind! Now hath a proof from your Lord come unto you, and We have sent down unto you a clear light;

As for those who believe in Allah, and hold fast unto Him, them He will cause to enter into His mercy and grace, and He will guide them unto Him by a straight road.

(The Meaning of the ***Glorious Qur'an****:* 4:171-176)

Jesus in the Glorious Qur'an

Introduction

The Qur'an tells us a lot of wonderful things about Jesus. As a result, believers in the Qur'an love Jesus, honour him, and believe in him. In fact, no Muslim can be a Muslim unless he or she believes in Jesus, on whom be peace.

The Qur'an says that Jesus was born of a virgin, that he spoke while he was still only a baby, that he healed the blind and the leper by God's leave, and that he raised the dead by God's leave.

What then is the significance of these miracles? First, the virgin birth. God demonstrates his power to create in every way. God created everyone we know from a man and a woman. But how about Adam, on whom be peace? God created him from neither a man nor a woman. And Eve from only a man, but not a woman. And, finally, to complete the picture, God created Jesus from a woman, but not a man.

What about the other miracles? These were to show that Jesus was not acting on his own behalf, but that he was backed by God. The Qur'an specifies that these miracles were performed by God's leave. This may be compared to the Book of Acts in the Bible, chapter 2, verse 22, where it says that the miracles were done by God to show that he approved of Jesus. Also, note that Jesus himself is recorded in the Gospel of John to have said, "I can do nothing of my own authority" (5:30). The miracles, therefore, were done not by his own authority, but by God's authority.

What did Jesus teach? The Qur'an tells us that Jesus came to teach the same basic message which was taught by previous prophets from God—that we must shun every false god and worship only the one true God. Jesus taught that he is the servant and messenger of that one true God, the God of Abraham. These Quranic teachings can be compared with the Bible (Mark 10:18; Matthew 26:39; John 14:28, 17:3, and 20:17) where Jesus teaches that the one he worshipped is the only true God. See also Matthew 12:18; Acts 3:13, and 4:27 where we find that his disciples knew him as Servant of God.

The Qur'an tells us that some of the Israelites rejected Jesus, and conspired to kill him, but Allah (God) rescued Jesus and raised him to Himself. Allah will cause Jesus to descend again, at which time Jesus will confirm his true teachings and everyone will believe in him as he is and as the Qur'an teaches about him.

Jesus is the Messiah. He is a word from Allah, and a spirit from Him. He is honoured in this world and in the hereafter, and he is one of those brought nearest to Allah.

Jesus was a man who spoke the truth which he heard from God. This can be compared with the Gospel According to John where Jesus says to the Israelites: "You are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God" (John 8:40).

The Virgin Birth of Jesus

Muslims believe in the virgin birth of Jesus. When the angels announced to Mary (peace be upon her) about Allah's promise that she will have a son, she was surprised, since she was a virgin. "How can this be?" she thought. She was reminded that it is easy for Allah to create whatever he wills.

> She said: My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal hath touched me? He said: So (it will be). Allah createth what He will. If He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! and it is (Qur'an 3:47).

It is not difficult for Allah to do anything he wants. He can create a child with both human parents or only one. No miracle is beyond His power. After all, He had created Adam (peace be upon him) from neither a man nor a woman. He created the rest of us from both man and woman. What is so hard if Allah decides to create a human being from a woman only? He only commands "Be!" and it occurs.

Some people think that since Jesus, peace be upon him, had no human father then God must be his father. The Qur'an rejects this view. The position of Jesus with Allah is comparable to the position of Adam with Allah. Just because Adam had no human parent does not mean we should call him the Son of God.

> Lo! the likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created him from dust,

> then He said unto him: Be! and he is. (Qur'an 3:59).

According to the Qur'an, everyone except Allah are His servants.

> And they say: the Beneficent hath taken unto Himself a Son. Assuredly ye utter a disastrous thing, whereby almost the heavens are torn, and the earth is split asunder and the mountains fall to ruins, that ye ascribe to the Beneficent a son, when it is not meet for (the Majesty of) the Beneficent that He should chose a son. There is none in the heavens and the earth but cometh unto the Beneficent as a slave. (Qur'an 19:88-93)

The Miracles of Jesus

According to the Qur'an, Jesus, on whom be peace, performed the following miracles by Allah's leave:

1. Spoke while he was only a baby.
2. Healed those born blind.
3. Healed the lepers.
4. Revived the dead.
5. Breathed life into a bird made of clay.

In the Qur'an Allah quotes Jesus, peace be upon him, as saying:

> Lo! I come unto you with a sign from your Lord. Lo! I fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it and it is a bird by Allah's leave. I heal him who was born blind, and the

> leper, and I raise the dead, by Allah's leave. And I announce to you what you eat and what you store up in your houses. Lo! herein verily is a portent for you if you are to be believers.
>
> And (I come) confirming that which was before me of the Torah, and to make lawful some of that which was forbidden unto you. I come unto you with a sign from your Lord, so keep your duty to Allah and obey me.
>
> Lo! Allah is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. That is a straight path. (Qur'an 3: 49-51)

Again, in the Qur'an Allah tells us about the situation on the Day of Judgement:

> In the day when Allah gathers together the messengers and says: What was your response (from mankind)? they say: We have no knowledge. Lo! Thou, only Thou art the Knower of Things Hidden.
>
> When Allah says: O Jesus, son of Mary! Remember My favour unto you and unto your mother; how I strengthened you with the holy Spirit, so that you spoke unto mankind in the cradle as in maturity; and how I taught you the Scripture and Wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel; and how you did shape of clay as it were the likeness of a bird by My permission, and did blow upon it and it was a bird by My permission, and you did heal him who was born blind and the leper by My permission . . . (Qur'an 5:109-110)

Not all of these miracles are recorded in the canonical gospels, the four gospels contained in the Christian Bible. The fact that Jesus spoke while he was yet a baby is not written anywhere in the Bible. This should not be surprising, because none of the Gospels can claim to recover every single event in the life of Jesus. Instead, the gospel According to John seeks to emphasize that the events were too many to record.

Similarly, the miracle of breathing life into a bird made of clay is not attested by the Christian Bible. This too should not make us wonder. It is obvious that the writers of the gospels could write down only the tradition that was available to them. Furthermore, they could not write down everything they knew about Jesus for they were writing on papyrus material that were very limited in length.

What is worthy to notice here is that the Prophet Muhammad, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, was honest enough to promulgate this information about Jesus. The religion taught by God through Muhammad would deny the divinity of Jesus. Any human being, therefore, who wished to deny the divinity of Jesus would have tried to belittle Jesus. Since Christians looked upon the miracles of Jesus as a proof of his divinity, we might expect that any human being who tries to deny the divinity of Jesus would not have informed people of miracles not previously known to them. He might have even tried to deny some of the miracles recorded in the canonical gospels. On the other hand, the prophet Muhammad honestly conveyed the message delivered to him from Allah. *(May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him.)*

Allah tells us the truth without fear. Human beings trying to win followers tell us only what is conducive to winning us over. They usually withhold information that could lead to opposite conclusions. On the other hand, Allah informs us about the miracles of Jesus even if people use this information to support their prior commitment to the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus. Allah does not need to win worshippers. Those who worship Allah does so for their own good. And those who worship false gods do so to their own detriment.

What Allah emphasizes, though, is that the miracles of Jesus do not prove he was divine. The miracles he performed were a sign, a proof, that he was God's messenger. He performed them with God's help and permission. Those who use his miracles as proof of his divinity would choose to forget the following sayings of Jesus:

> I can of my own authority do nothing. (John 5:30)

They also forget the declaration of Peter:

> Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves know. (Acts 2:22 KJV)

These passages suggest that Jesus did not do miracles on his own. These, rather were accomplished by God's leave. Allah reminds us of this. Jesus also constantly repeated to his audience that the miracles he performed were by God's leave.

O People of the Book,
Our Messenger has come to you:
he makes manifest to you many things
of the Book which you were concealing;
and passes over many things.
Light from Allah has come to you —
and a clear Book which guides to the Truth.
Thereby Allah leads to the paths of peace
those who seek His pleasure;
and He brings them out of the depths of
darkness into the Light of His grace,
and guides them towards the Right Way.

(Qur'an 5:15-16)

The Greatest Commandment in the Bible and the Qur'an

Some will say that this whole discussion over the divinity of Jesus is unnecessary. The important thing, they say, is to accept Jesus as your personal saviour. On the contrary, the Bible's writers stressed that, in order to be saved, it is necessary to understand who exactly is God. Failure to understand this would be to violate the first and greatest of all the commandments in the Bible. This commandment was emphasized by Jesus, on whom be peace, when a teacher of the Law of Moses asked him as follows:
"Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"
Jesus replied:
"The most important one is this: 'Hear O Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one. Love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark ch. 12, vv. 28-29)

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is Jesus God?

The Bible Says

No!

Shabir Ally